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# EARNING THE BLUE STRIPE

By  
**L. S. WANNAMAKER**  
Ex-Sgt. Med. Dept. U. S. Army

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## INTRODUCTORY

The contents of this book are the experiences of the Author while serving with the American Expeditionary Forces in France.

A few of the subjects dealt with in this book are as follows:—

Embarking for over-sea,—Life upon transports,—The English rest camp,—The French box car,—Life in a Billet,—Drinking wine in France,—The French people,—Mademoiselle Goofie, makes love to an officer,—La Guerre Finir.

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## FOREWORD.

I do not claim that this booklet is a work from a grammatical standpoint, but I do claim that it is a truthful, honest statement of the things experienced by myself and my comrades with whom I served.

I trust that the reader will derive as much pleasure from this booklet as I did, as I lived over again as it were, the happy days spent, while serving under our glorious flag in France.



# EARNING THE BLUE STRIPE

By L. S. Wannamaker.

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## CHAPTER I.

### Wherein We Embark.

Between August 3rd, and 10th, 1918, four long troop trains wended their way from Camp Kearny, near San Diego, Calif., to New York City.

At last after many months of eager expectation, the 144th Field Artillery was nearing an embarkation camp. None knew for certain which one, and not one man of them cared, as long as they were soon to slip out of the harbor of New York City to Somewhere in France.

The trains arrived at different hours, and immediately they arrived the men were marched upon one of the many large ferry boats which transported them to Long Island. It was then that we knew Camp Mills to be our destination.

True, we were rather fatigued from our seven days' ride, but the thought of going to France eclipsed all worry of that nature.

The first evening after our arrival, I had been detailed to receive our baggage and see that each man got his barrack bag. In the darkness I could not discern the number of what I took to be the correct mess-hall. Seeing a group of men standing around a bonfire of empty boxes, I approached them to ascertain the location of the correct hall. Placing my right hand upon the shoulder of one of the men I asked: "I say, chap old fellow, what mess-hall is this anyway?" When he turned around surprised, I was for the moment struck dumbfounded to think I had hugged one of our lieutenants.

It is needless to say that we were all very anxious to visit New York City. For my part, I craved a ride in the much talked of subway.

It looked for awhile that I would not have a chance to visit. But at last H and I got the passes necessary; so in we went wholehearted and free to fancies.

On our way in we were offered cigarettes by a newly made acquaintance. Now I had

H trained to accept and afterwards give them to me, as he doesn't smoke. He accepted one, but when our friend also offered a lighted match H blushed to the roots of his hair. I got that smoke, but somehow I did not get another in that manner from H.

Of course the first thing we did was to ride in a subway, and of course we got off at the wrong place, and who would not? One could not see anything and certainly could not understand the shouting conductor.

But it was just as well, for we were soon picked up by some people in a big limousine, taking us for a long drive thru Riverside Park.

Later they turned both the car and driver over to us with an invitation to go where we pleased, but alas, it was so late we were forced to hurry in order that we reach camp in time.

Soon we donned our new over-seas outfit which consisted of the usual uniform, with the exception of heavy trench shoes, trench cap and spiral leggings.

Noon of the 15th day of August found us in one of the large warehouses waiting for

the order to embark. While we waited the band played, filling the house with sound.

Then to our joy, the ever faithful Red Cross workers served us with milk, biscuits and other things.

Soon our detachment formed into a single file and passed before the official who checked our passenger lists; we shouted our names in full to him, received the card which indicated a certain place for twenty men in which they were to eat and sleep. We were first hustled up the gang-plank, then toward the fore-part of the ship, down one flight of steps into the hold. We found the hold like an oven, streams of perspiration oozed from every pore. We were glad to dump our packs and return to decks.

I shall always remember the scene which has been described so often, but which I could not properly appreciate, which we saw as we steamed past that nest of sky-scrapers, then the Statue of Liberty. A little further out we dropped anchor and remained until the following morning; at which time the rest of the transports had joined. We were

fourteen ships in all, besides the convoy of destroyers.

The ocean was very calm when we stood out to sea, in fact it remained so thruout the voyage. Very few of us were sick, and the British government saved no food as a result. The cooks expected an easy time of it, but to the contrary we ate so much it was necessary to put some of our cooks in the galley to help them out.

Our's was the good ship Oxfordshire, of I think Liverpool, a "lime-juicer", if you please. She possessed lots of deck room, was easy riding and rather fast for an old boat.

The holds had an arrangement of tables laid out at right angles to the sides. Each table had a capacity of twenty men for eating purposes and two for sleeping (we wern't supposed to sleep upon them, but we did). Over head were small compartments into which we stowed our packs. Just under those were rows of hooks for hammocks. After all hammocks had been slung, one was reminded of "sardines".

Seven o'clock (six bells) one would select a hammock, hang it in a likely place, then go

above to get a last lingering smoke. Upon returning, one's hammock would be compressed between two fat men, both snoring away. After locating elsewhere and thinking all well, you'd discover someone's foot in your face. However, one would have the privilege of sticking one's foot before some one else's face.

We thot we were at last to have an easy time of it, but one inspection followed another, and between these we had calisthenics. Also we wore life-belts at all times and a full canteen of water. The worst thing that happened to us, we could not smoke after dark. All windows had been painted over so as not to give out light.

Of course all strained their eyes trying to locate a sub. Tho we heard lots of rumors, we did not see any subs.

Then one morning we found upon coming above a most beautiful sea; light pea-green in color, with tiny white caps sparkling in the sun. I had only come up for a breath of fresh air, but was reluctant to leave it for fear that when I returned it would be gone. The color however, remained all day.

A sounding proved that we were in shallow water, which was the reason of the light color.

That evening as the sun seemed to sink in the Atlantic and causing the western horizon to glow with shades of purple-red was a fitting end of a perfect day.

In due course of time we landed, sometime at night, in the harbor of Liverpool. With common consent we laid aside the life-belts we had worn for eleven days.

The following morning we marched, up or down, I know not which, I think both, to that glorious rest cap, Knotty Ash, where only our stomachs had a rest.

But on our way there we had lots of fun with the English children, some of which were the prettiest I have ever seen, while others were equally unattractive. There were so many of them we could hardly pass. Those kids beat anything I have ever seen for begging. They asked for American pennies mostly; but in the event one hadn't pennies a nickel or perhaps a dime would suffice, and in the event a two-bit piece was given, they could accept without a blush.

Upon all sides we were bombarded with questions as, "A've you any cents som?" Of course we could not resist replying that we were brainless, whereupon they would stare up at us with questioning eyes, being "English".

At one time while we were resting, one kid stuck to me with such tenacity that I gave him a five cent piece, whereupon he started to ask me for everything he could think of that was American.

Another wanted an American match for a souvenir, I took out my box and immediately about a dozen kids rushed me. I then reflected of the scarcity of matches in Europe, and also about my smoking; I decided that I could not afford to lose one match.

We found them all very generous hearted. Merchants and bakers brought us cakes, pies, etc. I saw one little shaver with a pitcher of milk, thinking it the gift of a dairyman, I asked for a swallow, which he readily gave me. After I had swallowed the milk I asked him where he intended taking the milk as he did not offer the others any. He replied, "it's for the babe." I cannot express how I

felt then. Soon I gave away the souvenirs I had brought over for the French Mademoiselles.

A little further on an elderly woman offered me a cup of tea which I accepted. She kept pace with me while I drank the tea in gulps (I never cared much for tea).

Upon our arrival at camp we were shown to small round tents with wooden floors. Each tent was supposed to accommodate eight men. Each man had a mattress shaped like a coffin, so as to conform to the tent.



## CHAPTER II.

### **The French Box Car.**

I will not relate in detail our trip from England into France. Were I to relate our trip in full this would be a volume instead of a booklet. Besides, volumes have been written describing the beauty of both England and France.

Suffice to say that we traveled by railroad carriage (new things for us), from Knotty Ash to South Hampton, where we stayed one night. The next afternoon of which we shipped across the Channel to Le Havre. I experienced my first sea-sickness upon that trip. I fully expected a sub and all that goes with them, while crossing the channel. I thot I had a "hunch" that we would swim but nothing happened.

We arrived at Le Havre, a little after day-break. As we marched up thru town we forgot that the earth seemed to rise and quiver under us (effects of the voyage), for everything we saw was strange to us.

The language we, for the most of us, could not understand. The signs we could not read. We could hardly walk upon the cobbled streets. But we liked it all just the same.

The town of Le Havre must have been pretty bad, for no one under the rank of major could obtain a pass. We remained there a little over one day.

The next afternoon we loaded upon that, which is fresh, and which will always remain fresh in the minds of the American soldiers who served in France, "The French Box Car".

In the states, you remember, we occupied four long Pullman trains. In France we occupied one long freight train.

Our medical detachment was lucky upon this trip from La Havre, to Poitiers. We were thirty-three in one short car, made shorter than the rest on account of a compartment for the brakeman, which occupied about six feet of the car. Air brakes not being in use upon freight trains, it was necessary to place brakemen along the train in order to check the progress if desired. While most of the cars were equipped with little

dinky seats upon top and between the cars with hoods over them, ours boasted of a compartment within the car.

There was just enough room for twenty-nine men in the main part of the car for sleeping purposes, and packed like sardines at that. The four non-commissioned officers, including myself, slept in the smaller compartment. All of one night and the most of another I slept with my legs wound around some pipes under the brakeman's seat, in a way that I could not turn over nor could I get my legs under the seat in any different way.

Some cars had as many as forty-two men in them. Then sleeping is out of the question. One would doze off only to find upon awakening that all feeling and sense of touch had departed from one or both limbs. One would of course extricate the affected limb, place it upon the top of the pile of legs, arms, etc., but to no purpose, for it would soon be at the bottom, as others were doing the same thing.

Upon one occasion I tried to sleep while someone was sitting upon my chest, another

propped against my drawn-up knees (I drew them up to accommodate my comrade). My head rested upon the hard side of a pack. Sometime during the night I was awakened by a heavy man sitting down rather hard upon my left leg. He was swearing as tho his heart would break. And I was almost sure that my leg had been broken. Can you blame me for swearing a little also?

While traveling we ate corned beef (Willie), the canned variety, canned tomatoes, canned jam—everything we ate was from cans, with the exception of bread, and often that was in packages (hard bread).

At times there would be a ration of hot coffee. In fact, there were stations where coffee was prepared in large quantities for troops passing from one camp to another.

At one of these places we had received our allowance of half sweetened coffee, when to make sure that we had, Capt. D made inquiry. Finding that we could use more he took me with him to the station to try and obtain another pot-full. There we found the French sergeant (who had traveled with us from Camp Kearny, at which place

he had been an instructor), who was supposed to see that our regiment got a square deal. He insisted that all had been given coffee. Capt. D insisted that we had been left out. A captain can "get by" with almost anything, so we received another pot of coffee to the delight of the men. I do not think it any great harm to tell a "fib" once in a while.

The soldier who possessed even a slight knowledge of the French language was very popular indeed. Each stop (which was very numerous) we would call him to the door and get him to act as interpreter for us. But often he desired to talk on his own account, while we wished we had studied French.

About two o'clock one morning we arrived at Poitiers. The command was given to de-train and form into a column of fours. The Ordnance and Medical detachments were for some reason delayed. At last we started out, the Ordnance leading.

As we walked up a gradual incline, we could discern the railroad yards by the lights which were along the tracks upon our left.

There was a high bluff upon our right near

which dwelling houses had been built, many of which had caves nearby. These caves had been chisled into solid rock, and were used as wine cellars, etc.

After walking miles, as it seemed to us at the time, each man thinking of his own particular troubles, we woke up to the fact that we could no longer hear the footfalls of the detachment ahead. Knowing that we were lost, the lieutenant gave orders for us to camp as best we could by the roadside, which we were glad to do. The night being warm, we did not unroll our packs; each man found himself a smooth place and there slept until morning. If a picture could be made portraying our dreams that night, there would no doubt be a mixture of wives, sweethearts, big fat beds, and perhaps a great juicy steak or two.

Upon starting out from Le Havre, we had been told to make the food last for three days (a trick which only fooled us once), but as we were only on the train one day and almost two nights we had the most of the food with us which we packed. Upon getting up that morning we proceeded to eat

everything in sight. There should have been a can of jam in sight, but several of the boys had pilfered it the night before. I afterwards learned that the ones who made the biggest cry upon finding the jam gone were the ones who had eaten it.

Another stunt the Supply Company tried to "pull" was, as soon as we had finished a trip all jam was collected; but after the first occasion of that kind we ate the jam first to make sure we got it.

After eating our fill we found camp very easily; we had passed the road which led to it.

That same afternoon we marched to Migne, a small nearby village, preparatory to camping in billets. I was lucky enough to be detailed to ride in a truck and take care of those who were sick or ailing.

That night we camped in an old field just out of the village. But after riding cramped as we had been in those small cars, one night sleeping upon hard ground failed to put us into anything like an amiable state of mind. That morning we drew the left-over ration that the Supply Company had on hand for

breakfast; but the officer in charge of us understood that we were to make three meals of it. My share was so small and the jam (about one teaspoonful), which had been placed upon a small piece of bread, rolled around in my mess pan soiling the pan and smearing the jam around so that I could not find it again, made me so angry at the time that I threw mess-kit and all against a nearby wall. As a result I went hungry, which was a greater punishment than the calling down I received. I dislike confessing everything in this manner, but I desire to portray the actual conditions as they occurred. If there is anything that will make a soldier mad, it is to deprive him of his jam.

The afternoon of that day we marched out by battalions to our different billets. I have forgotten the way our village upon this occasion is spelled, but an American would have spelled it Naughta, and as it is not shown upon the maps, I am rather safe.

I was under the impression that the word billet meant, in the first place a good room, and second a private home and all that goes with home life. What we got was first a

hill to climb, up an alley, second a large empty, rough, cobwebbed room, the floor of which had cracks one could pass a cat thru. Sticking into the wall which enclosed the stairs, was an old copper-jacketed bullet which I extracted for a souvenir.

The Medical detachment had been divided into three parts. The squad I was with were attached to the third battalion or batteries E and F.

We had been traveling for over one month, we were all glad to settle down for a while and enjoy our strange surroundings.

The first things we did were to bathe, wash our clothes, eat everything we could get our hands upon, and last but not least, try the wines we had heard so much about. We bathed in a small creek and washed our clothes at the well worn wash place which consisted of stone slabs placed end to end along the banks of the creek. The bottom edge extended under the surface of the water and the top about two feet above; they were set at an angle of forty-five degrees. It was quite an art to wash one's clothes and save soap. The French women beat their clothes

with short broad paddles, and kneeled in a sort of three-sided box. We had no such luxury and when, after beating a garment upon the slabs, we saw our soap entering the water we changed ends and beat the soap the other way. It was a queer sight to see American soldiers among the French women (mostly very old ones), washing clothes.

Later on I saw an unique laundry, a regular establishment. About twenty girls and women stood in tubs just off the bank of a little stream. They washed upon little stands slanting in the opposite direction from them. A shed-like affair protected them from rain and sun. Behind this shed was the drying yard, across which wires were stretched about five feet apart and seven feet from the ground. When an American soldier passed along the road upon the opposite side of the stream, the girls would stop their work and stare as long as he could be seen. I venture to say, that while we stayed there the laundries' output of work was decreased by a lot.

But I am getting ahead of my story, to return to Naughta, another most interesting

feature of the French custom as I found it, was the food they ate, and the procedure of eating. To portray the customs of the peasant class, I will relate an experience I had while visiting one evening at one of the homes which was typical of that class.

The members of the household consisted of father, mother and two sons, one of which lived at home, while the other worked in a French hospital at Poitiers.

Having arrived, I was shown into the drawing room, which also served as library, dining room, kitchen and bed room as well. After showing me in the son went out to do the chores, leaving me with his mother, who seemed very kind, but I could not understand her nor she me. I could not understand the son either for that matter, but as we had more in common we could make out.

The French are reluctant to light lamps in the evening, upon this occasion I sat silent and thoughtful, wishing I had not come while the shadows of night crept into the room so that I could only see the dim outline of the articles of furniture. But to my great relief the mother soon brought in a bundle of dry

twigs which she lighted in the fire-place, after which she applied a gentle "breeze" from an antiquated bellows.

Supper begun, I was amused to see the operation of cooking in a fire-place, I soon saw that the mother was master of the situation. First, some stew that had been left over from dinner was warmed, second, onions which had been sliced very fine were put into a frying pan, when these were brown mussels were added. That is I supposed them to be mussels (they looked like snails) which when in the shell are about two and one-half inches long and a little over one inch in width.

When the son made an appearance, the mother spoke a few words to him, after which he made signs for me to remove from what I had taken for a window seat to a chair; after making the exchange, the mother opened the seat I had used; got out bread and other things; I had been sitting upon the bread box.

Supper being served, they insisted that I eat. I took one look at the snail-like mussels, remembered about the wine that would be

sure to follow, swallowed hard and accepted. Snails, mussels, or whatever they were, were good. Instead of slicing the bread, the loaf was passed around, each cut off as much as his or her appetite called for and instead of breaking bread, as they ate they would cut off small pieces with a sharp knife, a pocket knife is often used in that way. I have seen men and women upon the streets with hunks of bread and cheese, cutting both as we would an apple.

After we had finished eating the second son came to visit. He kissed the father first upon one cheek then upon the other, mother and brother took their turn, repeating the operation each time, I was feeling rather uncomfortable, when to my surprise he approached me, hand extended, saying in rather good American, "Good evening, Sir." Imagine my relief.

I visited Poitiers while we stayed at that place. While there I ate my first French "diner." It takes a great deal of time to dine well in France, not to mention the wining. Everything is served in courses.

Q and I walked in together. We selected

a likely restaurant and luckily for us the waitress understood some "American". We ordered the regular dinner and a small bottle of white wine each. After soup and egg omelettes had been brought we waited so long we thot that was all, however, meat was served, after which we had the choice of cheese and grapes for dessert; in the meantime I had looked up pie in my pocket dictionary, not taking a chance upon the waitress knowing how to pronounce it in American, but no pie was served, I selected grapes, and Q cheese.

It is a pretty sight to see small white tables and chairs to match upon the sidewalk over which there is a bright colored awning, say with wide stripes of white and orange. Almost at any time in the afternoon and evening one can find a gathering of men and women of various ages and for the most part well dressed, sitting at the tables sipping white or red wine, While the French do a lot of talking and smoking as they sip wine, the Americans have a tendency to drink fast. Some of the soldiers wondered how the French people drink all day and not become intoxicated; the reason is obvious.

There is a trick the wine dealers have that is worthy of mention. One will order a glass of white wine and will be given an excellent quality, almost champagne in fact; but upon ordering the second glass one will be told that it is finished, "finir"; then he will try and sell one a cheap grade of red wine. While writing of wines I must say that when we came into town the price of wine, and in fact everything, went up sky high. Yes, I'll say our French neighbors are thrifty.



## CHAPTER III.

### **Mademoiselle Amelia.**

Our next stop was at a little place near Bordeaux, called Pont de la Maye, nothing of interest happened there and we did not stay sufficient length of time to become acquainted. After a few words concerning the unique way the French have of operating the street cars, we will proceed to Coudes, our final destination.

Women for the most part operated the street cars, which were not unlike our American cars, but if passengers were numerous smaller cars were attached, these were without motors. The fare for riding any distance was "dix centimes", or about two cents in American money. Instead of using a bell and cord as we do, the conductors would blow a horn, which sounds not unlike the horns we hear at Christmas time, in signal to the motorman or motorwoman.

I have written that Coudes was our destination, but really Clermont, Fer. was headquar-

ters for that section, and Coudes, the billet for our battalion. The region around Clermont, Fer. is hilly and mountainous. There are many ruined chateaus, some of which are historical, amongst the hills; several of these were in the immediate vicinity of Coudes. At Montpeyroux, a little town situated upon a high hill near Coudes, there stands a high tower which is still in good condition. This tower was used as a fort long ago. The wall is very thick, there being a stair case built within the wall which led to the top.

A real reception was given us as we entered Coudes, little children presented us with flowers, the school house and city hall combined was decorated with flags, both American and French, and best of all, everyone wore a happy smile. For a few hours we camped in the school yard, and we were all tired and hungry as usual. But as tired as the cooks were, they rigged up stoves in a temporary way and proceeded to warm up some canned corned beef, which was a change as we had been eating it cold.

One of the artillerymen, a little later, was found asleep upon the ground, stretched out

full length upon his back and snoring. For fun, we placed the flowers the children had given us upon him until only his face was visible; then one of the buglars blew taps very low and then louder until he awakened. The children took great interest in the proceedings. All that O'B did was to yawn, grin in a contented way then dropped off to sleep again. He afterwards told me that he had a blister upon each foot at the time.

Our detachment was shown to a building which had been a bakery at one time and was very nicely located for the Infirmary, being in the center of the town. Also there were two rooms upstairs with beds, etc., which we were told we could occupy. We thot we had a home there, but the crazy old Frenchman thot that an Infirmary would disease his bakery, so we moved out.

We next occupied what had been a butcher shop, which had a good cement floor. Our sleeping quarters were back and down in the rear of the building. The house had been built upon a hill, and in order to get to our room we had to go down a steep tunnel-like passage, which had a lot of steps at dif-

ferent places which was sure to surprise one at night. The room itself was shaped somewhat like the fourth of a pie, but not so soft. The floor consisted of slabs of stone, not so uneven as one might think, but hard, I assure you. We filled our ticks with hay which did not make such a bad bed.

Now the old gentleman who owned this property lived up stairs over the Infirmary with a daughter, a widow of about forty winters, who had a little daughter of about fourteen summers. Madam was rather dark complexioned, had great black eyes, a long nose and no chin to speak of. She had a way of thrusting her face close up to one and talking like a rapid fire machine gun, blinking her eyes to punctuate her speech; as she talked very fast her eyes blinked a great many times. Then again she had a way of punching one when she had completed a sentence. I have never seen a town that did not have a town fool and a woman who was a joke. I know it is a hard thing to say, but it is true; and Madam was the joke of Coudes.

In the French army a sergeant is thot to be some "mogul", and the French people

are under the same impression about sergeants in our American army. Madam therefore, made some inquiry about myself; and the boys, for fun told her that I was very rich, had large possessions in America, and traveled for pleasure. (I did not know anything of this until later). One day the Madam cornered me, talked, blinked and punched at me until I got what she was driving at. Would I marry and make France my home? Would I live in Coudes for the rest of my stay upon earth? Would I like to meet a charming young lady? Much amused, I said maybe to the first two questions and as for the last, I certainly would like to meet a charming young lady.

I did not hear more of the matter for some time, I concluded that Madam had forgotten the matter. Then one day she brought in Mademoiselle, Amelia ————. I was informed that Mademoiselle was engaged in making “une petite sac pour ma soeur.” I asked how much she charged, for answer Madam caught me by the arm, hauled me across the floor and put Mademoiselle’s arm within mine, commanding us to promenade.

Mademoiselle blushed and I felt rather warm about the neck. Madam thot me very stupid, I know, and maybe I was, however, had she given me time I would have asked Mademoiselle for the pleasure of promenading. By this time the boys (the rascals) were laughing at me, declaring that if I would not go they would.

So out we promenaded. We walked some miles to another village, where Mademoiselle visited her dressmaker. I was shown into the bed room, where the coat was fitted upon Mademoiselle. Well, I thot I would pull my cap to pieces before I finally got out of there. Just how I got out I do not know; I faintly remember seeing an old man enter the room and beckon to me to come out, which I was very willing to do. While he poured out some wine he made signs as if he would like to say, "Why man, you do not belong in there." I said, "I know, but why the devil!" When I started to speak he stopped pouring wine to look at me; I became silent. Then after we had raised our glasses above our heads and said with much feeling "Vivre Amerique" then "Vivre la Francais" all was

well. Now kind reader do not think ill of Mademoiselle Amelia, for she is a very good girl. She slapped the face of one of the boys at a dance one night because he tried to steal a kiss.

When our band paid us a visit, which they did about once each week, there would be great excitement in the village. The natives would walk from the neighboring town in order that they could hear the "Band de militaire". The Mayor, upon those occasions would send wine out to the players. I saw one artilleryman borrow an instrument from one of the players until the wine had been passed, after which he returned the instrument to its owner. Once in a while the band could be persuaded to stay for the evening and play for a dance. The girls took great interest in the dances. "Oh! Those Wild, Wild Women," was sung by Pvt. S, who was willing to sing at most any time to please the boys.

It was very amusing, the names the boys gave the billets; there was the "Country Club", "Half Way House" and the "Jackass Billet." This last was in a stable-like affair

and which had been a stable at one time, judging by the way it looked when the boys first moved into it, and got its name on account of a jack who had stable room there. Mr. Jack was in the habit of blowing reveille at five o'clock sharp each morning. His time was an hour ahead of our's, but he had been blowing at five for so many years he would not reform. If the boys did not respond to his bugle call he would proceed to break down the bars and even pull the blankets from the beds with his teeth. I think that billet the most unpoplar of them all.

The next thing of interest was a concert the regiment gave, using the last mentioned billet for a hall. I must say that our regiment was well supplied with talent, we had actors that had worked upon the legitimate stage, songsters galore, and a few moving picture men.

I had a sort of understanding with Mademoiselle Amelia, that we would meet at the show and as the house filled, I hung around the entrance thinking that I might be of service in procuring a seat. While waiting, the Madam came with her daughter, for both of

whom I got seats. Finally Mademoiselle came, after the house had been filled almost to capacity, she had brought a girl friend, whom I had not before seen. I found seats, however and was successful in getting one of the boys to hold them while I went back to get the girls. But do you think they would enter? No sir, they were afraid of the crowd or something. I pleaded with them to enter and be seated, not wishing to have a scene. But still they hung back. Then after a bit we attracted the attention of some fellows who delighted in fun of any kind. "Take her in Doc " they called over to me. I then took their arms in a business like manner, but they started to struggle. "Take her in Doc", the boys persisted. I was thinking of the possibility of my picking her up and carrying her to a seat, when I was struck by a happy thot; I pointed to the Madam and after Mademoiselle Amelia finally saw Madam sitting there all serene and uneaten, she allowed me to lead her to a seat; I had to make an extra trip for her friend however, as she was still shy.

When the show started there was more ex-

citement than John saw. A contortionist and rough and tumble man was going through his antics when Madam became excited, she stood up and tried to talk with everybody around her, pointing and punching by turns. But the soldiers in her immediate vicinity made so much fun of her she soon left. I felt very sorry for the Madam, but really she should not have stood up.

The next day I learned that a much more breathless drama had gone on in the front row. The Colonel, with his staff, had attended the show, seats being reserved in the front row.

Now there was a girl in town whom the boys called "Goofie". She was about twenty years of age, of medium height, inclined toward plumpness as to build, her hair was the color of clear pebbles after having been dried in sand. Goofie would do anything she was told to do regardless. Some second lieutenants put Goofie up to sit by one of the highest officers, just how high I am afraid to say, besides this booklet is not supposed to mention names. Goofie soon cottoned up to the officer, who in turn retreated in good order;

but she followed up the attack. When retreating was out of the question, as the officer was hard pressed against the party upon his other side, and the girl not being encouraged, soon dropped off to sleep upon the officer's shoulder. I'll venture to say that was one show he didn't enjoy.

I have had the question asked me so many times since returning to the states, "How did you like the French girls?" That I take it for granted that a possible reader of this booklet would like to ask the same question, and really, as so many of the boys married French girls, it has become a matter of importance. Then again I was asked upon one occasion, "Which do you like the best, the American or French girls?" As for the first, I was greatly amused, charmed, and entertained. Will I be that ungallant when I write, as a child is with a new toy? I assure you that no ungallantry is meant, but I believe that most of the returned soldiers who served in France will agree with me. As for the second question, I am an American, and am too proud of American womanhood to give the French women precedence over the

American women. When I see a typical French girl I think of the fashion plate, and when I look upon our typical American girls I think of natural beauty.

The word "Plaisanter" in the French language has a very wide meaning indeed; almost anything can be said if one finishes up with that magic word "Plaisanter" (to joke). I have seen men with their wives who would be joking with American soldiers, say in restaurants; the wife would propose that she and the soldier marry, go to America, and leave the husband in France. If the soldier did not understand and look shocked, she would say "plaisanter" and all would be well; the husband would not mind in the least. One husband, in the presence of his wife, asked me if I would marry and stay in France,. I jokingly replied that I would in case I found a girl just like his wife, who was beautiful in a way; both seemed pleased at the compliment.

The French philosophy, as I understood it, was, this old world has been going on for so long, generations have lived and died, we will

pass away, why worry, be pleasant, drink  
today for tomorrow we may die.



## CHAPTER IV.

### **La Guerre Finir.**

One afternoon I heard a great commotion in the street, women were shouting, men were shaking hands with each other, flags both French and American, were being waved. Thinking that something of unusual importance had happened, I walked up toward the hotel. Very soon my ears caught the words "La Guerre Finir." Then I knew that the armistice had been signed, also that our hopes of getting to the front were gone.

I admit I was sad, also that it was a selfish thot. I suppose, had I been upon the front at the time I would have been glad. We had waited for months to come to France, had arrived only to be stopped upon the eve of going into action. Our regiment was at the time doing the range practice, we were being supplied with guns, and fine ones they were, too, when this armistice came along knocking everything sky high. My first fears had departed, I feared no more the Hun bul-

lets; of course I may have been afraid at the actual time of entering action, but who knows about that until one tries it? I was not alone in thinking as I did, most of the men thot the same.

The church bell was rung for an hour or more. I reflected at the time that as the bell was over two hundred years old, that had not been the first occasion of its kind that it had rung.

That night about half of the battalion drank to drown their sorrow and the other half drank to celebrate the occasion. Sgt. L, Corp. H, dear old Wild Bill and I, had a time I think we shall all remember as long as we live. Yes, the night of the 11th of November, 1918, was a wild night.

Then followed days of rumor, I think there was a rumor to fit every question that came up. The stripes we were to get for over-seas service were of great interest to all of us. First we were to have one silver stripe for each six months served in the states and one gold stripe for the over-seas service; then there was added one silver star for those who had volunteered.

I will not relate our trip returning home, for it would be in part only a repetition of our journey over to France.

Suffice to say that we departed from Coudes the morning after Thanksgiving day, sailed from Bordeaux December 23rd, 1918, in the good ship Matsonia, landed at Hoboken January 3rd, 1919.

After we landed we were sent to Camp Merritt, N. J., a veritable paradise, it seemed to us.

We had been gone four months and nineteen days. Though we did not earn the gold stripe which was for six months service overseas, we earned the blue, which was for over four months.

(FINIR)





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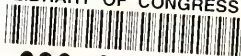


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